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LIVING CONTRADICTION

Robert R. Williams, *Hegel on the Proofs and the Personhood of God: Studies in Hegel's Logic and Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2017. £65. pp. 333. ISBN: 978-0-19-879522-3).

The ontological argument is fundamental to human nature, which, as the rational elevation of finite spirit to God, is necessarily constituted by the truth it seeks. Strongly rejecting Kant's critical philosophy and subjective dogmatism, in which the concept lacks content and God is a mere postulate on the edge of a Humean sensory world, Hegel shows how contradiction and negativity open the possibility of determinate, objective, actualized meaning in a theistic world. Distilling a lifetime's scholarship, Williams passionately defends the unfashionable and neglected rational metaphysics of centre-middle Hegelianism. The ontological argument works, he contends, because thought's subjective form and objective content must be cognitively reconciled. The argument reveals the purposive character of thought, with the finite leading into the infinite as the concept's contrary, rather than being statically set against the infinite, as in Kant.

Williams's major constructive aim is to demonstrate how Hegel roots this speculative metaphysics in personhood. Unlike Kant's isolated autonomous 'subject', the person is finite spirit, being a unity in difference who is conscious of the fact. Bearing the weight of this contradiction, they are thus the singularity of the concept. Yet in freedom they inhabit the communities of family, civil society and the state, within which recognition takes place and which are each corporate persons with their own social consciousness. Similarly, the living Christian God is absolute spirit who, in Christ, freely self-communicates in dismemberment, sacrifice and even death, and who is present in the community of the Church.

Although Williams rightly insisting on the particularity of spirit in ecclesial, political and social forms, his analysis remains highly abstract. For theologians and ethicists it would have been interesting to have seen how Hegel's vision played out in the concrete specifics of his proposals for church polity, electoral reform and judicial reform. Moreover, the exposition is sometimes repetitive, although this is almost inevitable given the methodology of its subject. Nevertheless, as a philosophical study this book is extraordinarily lucid. It will greatly extend understanding of a difficult but rewarding thinker who led important developments in kenotic Christology, Trinitarian theology and ecclesiology.

DAVID GRUMETT

School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh